

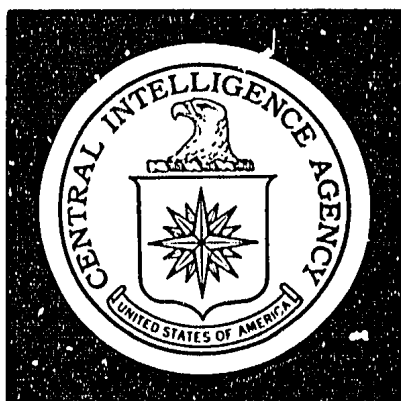
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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

STABILITY IN PARAGUAY

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9 April 1970
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
9 April 1970

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Stability in Paraguay

Summary

Friction between the Stroessner government and proponents of political liberalization increased over the last year, but the government retains the support of the real sources of power--the armed forces and the Colorado Party. Plotting by subversive groups, demonstrations by students, and the excommunication of government officials by a reform-minded church have provoked vigorous--and frequently disproportionate--government reaction. They have not, however, seriously threatened the country's stability, nor have they visibly weakened the general public support for President Stroessner.

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Clandestine Service.

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Factors for Stability

1. Two elements have given Paraguay a degree of stability unmatched in its history: Alfredo Stroessner and the racial and cultural homogeneity of the Paraguayan people.

2. Since leading an alliance between the army and a conservative faction of the Colorado Party in a bloodless coup in 1954, Stroessner has been the most powerful political force in the country. He is a hardworking and able administrator who knows his own people and has zealously protected his position. Stroessner clearly relishes being president, is apparently in good health, and is constitutionally eligible for re-election in 1973. Barring assassination or some major deterioration in the internal situation, he seems unlikely to relinquish his role.

3. The majority of Paraguayans are not averse to having an authoritarian president particularly those who remember the political turbulence of the decade before Stroessner took office. Stroessner is widely popular despite his continuing reliance on a state of siege and his harsh treatment of real or potential opponents.

4. Class distinctions in Paraguay are minimal. There is a great deal of rapport between the small upper-level sector of society and the bulk of the people, despite the economic chasm that divides them. One reason for this situation, which is unique in South America, is racial and linguistic homogeneity. About 95 percent of the people are mestizo and at least 90 percent speak Guarani. In addition, two bloody wars, one in the 19th century and one in the 1930s against Bolivia, forged an intense patriotism. The fact that General Stroessner is a military hero and openly demonstrates his personal courage by mingling with crowds bolsters the people's national pride and unity.

Students and the Church

5. The Catholic Church and a small segment of the university students made repeated attempts during

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1969 to gain social and political reforms. At present, the church-state conflict is at a standoff. Students have been quiet since last October when they conducted hunger strikes and class boycotts to protest government harassment of student leaders who had led demonstrations against Governor Rockefeller in June. Further incidents are likely, but the church/student assault on what the government sees as its prerogatives poses no immediate threat to stability because it lacks support from any elements within the government, the armed forces, or the Colorado Party.

6. University students are by no means representative of Paraguayan society. Only about one out of 300 children who enter the first grade ever graduates from a university. Enrollment at the two universities in Asuncion totals approximately 7,500, the majority of whom come from the small upper-income groups.

7. The students are roughly divided into Colorados and non-Colorados, with no strong independent student organizations. Unlike students elsewhere in Latin America, they appear little attracted by Marxism. University reform is the big issue at present. The most pressing student demands are for more liberal administrators, financial aid for students, improvement in teaching techniques and curricula, and a student union. On many issues, students and faculty are separated along political lines, with the Jesuit faculty members heavily influencing the non-Colorado group.

8. The church, on the other hand, is a far more formidable opponent than Stroessner has faced in the past. In a country where 97 percent of the people are Catholic, where constitutionally the President must be a Catholic, and where the church as an institution enjoys great authority, especially among the campesinos, the old methods of intimidation, arrest, and deportation of dissenters are very likely to prove counterproductive.

9. In the past year, church leaders, armed with Papal encyclicals and goaded on by a coterie of activist priests, have openly responded to what they see

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as injustices in temporal affairs and government encroachment on ecclesiastical prerogatives. The church took public issue with the regime on the sensitive problem of political prisoners and on a proposed new internal security law. It opposed the administration on control of the Catholic University and refused to accede to government demands that four Jesuits be transferred out of the country.

10. Never inclined to ignore a challenge, the government countered with harassing measures. The church newspaper was closed down, two Jesuit faculty members of Catholic University were exiled, and Catholic-sponsored welfare programs were badgered.

11. Future developments will be governed by whether the church will move toward reform or revolution, whether the church gets any backing from important military and political leaders, and whether Stroessner sees a vital need to regain church support.

Other Opposition

12. The traditional opposition political parties do not appear to be a real threat to the government. Stroessner has effectively limited their ability to prosper either as legitimate or clandestine political organizations. Moreover, they, like the students, lack the all-important element of contact with dissident elements, if there are any, within the government or military.

13. It is true that Stroessner has allowed certain opposition parties to participate in the political life of the country since 1962. As a result, some have abandoned their subversive attitudes. The Radical Liberal Party, the Liberal Party, and the Revolutionary Febrerista Party took part in the 1968 elections, but their combined vote amounted to only 29 percent of the total. Liberalization is slowly coming to Paraguayan political life, but only on the terms and timetable of Stroessner and the Colorado Party.

14. The arrest and deportation late last year of four members of the small Christian Democratic

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Party for allegedly talking politics with some military officers demonstrates that Stroessner still has the power to turn off the spigot of liberalization when he chooses. In recent months the government has frequently subjected its critics to censorship, beatings, arrests, and deportations. The use of Colorado Party bully-boys and police to break up a lay/clergy procession protesting the expulsion of a Jesuit professor in October is a good example of Stroessner's intolerance of dissent.

15. The Paraguayan Communists, as in the past, are no real threat to stability. The Paraguayan Communist Party, representing a foreign ideology disapproved of by the great majority of the people, is weak and divided. The party is illegal and has been severely repressed by the government; most of its leaders are in exile or prison.

16. To judge from the focus of recent repressive measures, the small Colorado Popular Movement (MOPOCO) is probably the most active subversive group. The movement was formed in exile in 1959 by dissident Colorados after an unsuccessful power struggle with Stroessner. It is credited with making the last serious attempt to unseat the General, in 1962. In January 1970 a dozen MOPOCO members or sympathizers and one respected military officer were arrested on suspicion of plotting against the government. No trials will take place, and many questions will go unanswered, but the suspects have in effect been found guilty of conspiracy.

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Conclusions

17. Paraguay is stable because President Stroessner and the Colorado Party retain their control of the sources of power and popular support. There is no evidence of dissidence within the government, the army, or police, and the apprehension of a number of suspects in December and January demonstrates the effectiveness of the security services

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and the lack of access by would-be subversives to the sources of power in Paraguay. Within the last two years a progressive Catholic Church, aided by and sometimes siding with some university students, has confronted the government with demands for reform.

18. So far, the Church-State dispute does not seem to have polarized the military, the Colorado Party, or society in general to any great degree. There is little indication that the church's proposals for reform have won any substantial military or political support. Nevertheless, if the Church-State dispute worsens, choices will almost certainly have to be made, and the government could face a severe test. Neither the Church nor the regime appears to want a confrontation, however, and some modus vivendi probably will be reached.

19. It appears that Paraguay is slowly progressing to a point where the government will have to develop some degree of finesse in countering demands for reform, but for the present the government clearly retains both the option and the disposition to halt at least temporarily the forces for change.

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